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INFORMATION  
CONTACT:  
Brad Luna  
(202) 225-2701

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 21, 2002

***Arkansas Riverbed Settlement Legislation And The Oklahoma Native American Cultural Center And Museum Bill Pass In The Last Moments Of The 107th Congress***

Washington, D.C. --

In the last moments before closing the 107th session, the United States Senate passed a legislative package that included two bills sponsored by Second District Congressman Brad Carson. S. 2017, a package of legislation affecting Native American tribes nationwide, included H.R. 3534, legislation that provides settlement to certain land claims of the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations along the Arkansas Riverbed and H.R. 2742, legislation that authorizes the construction of a Native American Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City. S. 2017 passed the House on November 15, 2002. Passage by both the Senate and House ensures that this legislation will be sent to President Bush for his signature and enactment into law.

"I am immensely pleased that these two pieces of legislation affecting a number of tribes in Oklahoma were passed by both houses of Congress. The Arkansas Riverbed Settlement legislation will help to resolve a terrible wrong that was inflicted on the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations with respect to land claims along the Arkansas River. The construction of the Native American Cultural Center and Museum will impart the importance of Native American history and culture to the state of Oklahoma, while helping to stimulate the Oklahoma economy through construction and tourism."

"I would like to particularly thank Congressman Wes Watkins for his tireless efforts in ensuring that these two pieces of legislation were passed by both the House and Senate. His leadership qualities and statesman skills were invaluable toward a bi-partisan effort in advancing these pieces of legislation."

The Arkansas Riverbed Settlement legislation will help to resolve certain land claims by the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations along the Arkansas Riverbed. Since 1907, these Indian Nations have been wrongfully deprived of claims and interest in land and resources along the Arkansas Riverbed. When Oklahoma became a state, the state acted on the assumption that it owned title and interest in resources along the Arkansas

Riverbed. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), also acting on this assumption, took no action to protect the Indian Nations' Riverbed resources along the Arkansas River. In 1970, the United States Supreme Court decided in the case of Choctaw Nation vs. Oklahoma (396 U.S. 620), that the Indian Nations retained title to their respective portions of the Riverbed along the Arkansas River. In 1989, the three Indian nations filed a lawsuit against the BIA for damages and mismanagement of resources along the Arkansas River. The passage of this legislation, unanimously endorsed by the three Indian nations, will result in the dismissal of the mismanagement case against the BIA, and avert litigation against thousands of landowners who have occupied drybed lands along the Arkansas Riverbed. Without federal legislation, further litigation against the landowners would be likely, and any final resolution of disputes would be timely and entail great expense to the United States, the Indian nations, and the individuals and entities occupying the drybed lands.

To settle these land claims, the legislation authorizes \$40 million to be distributed among the Indian nations and disbursed in quarterly installments. The legislation also includes a provision that provides other federally recognized tribes with 180 days to file a claim of title, interest or entitlement in the Arkansas Riverbed.

The Native American Cultural Center and Museum legislation authorizes \$33 million of federal funding for the development of the Cultural Center and Museum. The development of the Cultural Center and Museum is a collaborative effort of private, state, tribal and local initiatives; as such, the remaining funding will come from private, state, tribal and local funding, including the 300-acre tract of land donated by the city of Oklahoma City, which has an estimated value of \$15 million. The Native American Cultural Center and Museum will be constructed as a place to tell the stories of the tribes of Oklahoma, promote Oklahoma Indian art, and educate people about the Native culture of the state. It is anticipated the Cultural Center and Museum will be completed in time for the Oklahoma Centennial Celebration in 2007.

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